

THE SPEECH, AND ITS CONTEXT:

**JACOB BLAUSTEIN'S SPEECH
"THE MEANING OF PALESTINE PARTITION TO
AMERICAN JEWS"**

**GIVEN TO
THE BALTIMORE CHAPTER, AMERICAN JEWISH
COMMITTEE**

FEBRUARY 15, 1948

BY

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ISBN 978-1-257-01073-8

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KEY TO CITATIONS

AJC Library and Archives of the American Jewish Committee, New York City.

ajcarchives.org Searchable on-line database of digitized records of the organization. Citation includes the file name of the group of documents in which record is found.

AJHS American Jewish Historical Society, Newton Centre, Mass. and New York, N.Y.

AJYB *American Jewish Year Book.*

FRUS *Foreign Relations of the United States.*

JHU The Collected Personal and Business Papers of Louis and Jacob Blaustein, MS 400, Special Collections, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland.

NYPL The New York Public Library.

PRO FO Public Records Office, Foreign Office records, London, UK.

YIVO Records of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) deposited in care of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Center for Jewish History, New York City.

Undated cover photograph of Jacob Blaustein speaking, and photographs on pages 184 and 189, used by permission from the Collected Personal and Business Papers of Louis and Jacob Blaustein, MS 400, Special Collections, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, The Johns Hopkins University.

The so-called Jewish State is not to be called by that name but will bear some appropriate geographical designation. It will be Jewish only in the sense that the Jews will form a majority of the population.

American Jewish Committee
President Joseph Proskauer, Sept. 15, 1946¹

We would be saying we were misled (-not that I disagree with telling that if we finally fail in correcting the situation).

American Jewish Committee
President Jacob Blaustein, October 12, 1949²

1 Proskauer to Executive Board, Sept. 15, 1946. See page 95.

2 Blaustein to Proskauer, letter, Oct. 12, 1949. See page 180.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would not have been able to accomplish this book without the excellent assistance of the library professionals **Cynthia Requardt**(retired), **Margaret Burri**, **Kelly Spring**, and **Jim Stimpert**, at Special Collections, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, entrusted with the care and presentation of the Collected Personal and Business Papers of Louis and Jacob Blaustein.

The generous cooperation and liberal openness of **David Singer**, Director of Research at the American Jewish Committee, New York City, is a tribute to that organization.

Michele Anish, who during my research was Librarian of the Blaustein Library and Archives of the American Jewish Committee, saved me innumerable hours by her willingness to share her knowledge of the Committee's records of over 100 years of service to Jews and gentiles in the United States and around the world.

The Center for Jewish History, the home of **YIVO Institute for Jewish Research** and the New York location of the **American Jewish Historical Society**, is a New York City custodian of Jewish archival material which is supportive and welcoming to researchers. The Center also houses the Leo Baeck Institute, the American Sephardi Federation, and Yeshiva University Museum.

Permissions to reproduce the material in this book and the extensive professional help I have received from these institutions of knowledge, is gratefully acknowledged. Of course, responsibility for the use to which the material is turned is mine alone.

Abba A. Solomon

My special thanks to Abraham Raher and Eleanor Solomon of Baltimore, for facilitating my work there, and to my dear Yehudit, Judith E. Solomon, without whom this book would not exist.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JACOB BLAUSTEIN'S SPEECH, AND ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

THE CORE of this book is a speech entitled "The Meaning of Palestine Partition for American Jews."

The book contains the full text of the February 15, 1948 address by American Jewish Committee (AJC) executive committee chairman (and next president) Jacob Blaustein to the Baltimore chapter of the AJC. The speech is found in the Collected Personal and Business Papers of Louis and Jacob Blaustein, at The Johns Hopkins University.³

Mr. Blaustein's speech is reproduced in pages 17-48. Added to the speech — as given — is text struck out from a February 8 draft version of the speech, found in the same folder in the Blaustein papers. That removed text, printed here in **bold** characters, seemed to this writer significantly different from the final presentation.

Following the speech, the book contains materials from the American Jewish Committee archives, the Blaustein papers at Johns Hopkins University, and other sources, which show the development of the AJC's policy relating to the Jewish "homeland" in Palestine, and the subsequent State of Israel.⁴

The genesis of this book was curiosity of this writer about the "Ben Gurion-Blaustein Statement" or "Exchange of Views" of 1950.

American Jewish Committee officers Joseph Proskauer and Jacob Blaustein objected to Israeli leaders stating or implying that Jews, especially Western youth, should return "home" to the new State of Israel. They insisted that Prime Minister David Ben Gurion (and subsequent Israeli PMs through Golda Meir) disavow statements that said or implied this, in a public "Exchange of Views" in Jerusalem, August 23, 1950.

In the exchange, Blaustein promised that the AJC and other American Jewish organizations, "within the framework of their American

3 The text used is from box 4.113, file VV-5-32, "Jacob Blaustein Speeches - AJC Ex Committee, Baltimore Chapter 2-15-48," JHU.

4 The AJC's newsletter, the *Committee Reporter*, said that in the "notable address...Mr. Blaustein called attention to the consistency and realism of the AJC's fundamental stand on Palestine since the issuance of the Balfour declaration in 1918..." "Partition Plan Linked to Peace," *The Committee Reporter*, vol. 5, no. 3, March 1948, page 1.

citizenship," would continue to "do all we can to increase further our share in the great historic task of helping Israel" — abandoning a threat to publicly split with the Zionist state.⁵

Investigation of that extraordinary episode led me to understand that facts of significance in relations between American Jewry and Zionists are not so much "hidden" today as omitted.

Jacob Blaustein's speech is an excellent illustration of when the omissions started, and the reasons. We see a key moment when that American Jewish world transformed to ours:

- the creation of now-familiar methods of defense and justification for the State of Israel, and
- the exclusion, from the American Jewish mainstream, of questioning political nationalism of the Jewish people.

Baltimore, the site of Blaustein's speech, was a center of both Zionist and anti-Zionist American Jewish activity. It was the home of Henrietta Szold, founder of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, and Rabbi Morris S. Lazaron, a founder of the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism.

In the speech, we see the moment when the die is cast for American Jewish policy to the new State of Israel, and the arguments that will be asserted:

- that the State of Israel is an American ally; is essentially like the US in values and culture; and represents US interests in the middle east.*
- that US Jews should be both innocent of political connection to

⁵ See chapter "The Ben Gurion-Blaustein 'Exchange of Views'—1950," page 184.

* This has a chimerical quality depending on the needs of the time: during the Cold War, the Labor government of Israel was presented as an important ally to stem international Communist progress, and now Israel is a bulwark against "Islamic extremism."

the "foreign" State of Israel, and at the same time fraternally helpful.

- that the State of Israel only acts with force when that is necessitated by irrational adversaries, but hopes for reasoned settlement of conflicts, as the benign nature of its aims are finally recognized.
- that the creation of Arab refugees was regrettable; existence of Jewish refugees was intolerable.

More broadly, we see Blaustein, a major American Jewish leader:

- who saw combating Jewish nationalism as an important value for the welfare of Jews.
- who knew the State of Israel flag as a banner of a factional movement, Zionism, within Jewry.
- who after the state's creation faithfully advocated for the new state to the American government.
- who valued the American Jewish way of life in a heterogeneous and non-sectarian country.
- whose vision of the Jewish settlement in Palestine was of a homeland coexisting in equality with Palestinian Arabs.

In the ongoing wars that followed the birth of the State of Israel, arguments and explanations for Israeli policy were weapons deployed for the state. Public discussion of some facts about the state seemed weapons aimed at the Jews of Palestine, and would endanger — it was feared — Jews elsewhere.⁶

6 See chapter "Qibya, 1953," page 161.

Forty-seven years after Blaustein's speech, in a 1995 AJC statement, what was established as the bounded limit of institutional Jewish opinion was only intensified, with the addition of control of all Jerusalem as a manifest necessity:

Jews everywhere have a stake in preserving Jerusalem as the eternal and undivided capital of Israel. Moreover, the active involvement of the United States in the region has been a critical factor in preserving Israel's security and advancing the peace process. The continuing efforts by American Jews on behalf of ongoing U.S. support for Israel — diplomatic, strategic, economic and moral — remain a necessity....

American Jews are plainly entitled to express their opinions and offer their advice on anything about which they are informed. Unanimity can no more be expected of them than it can of Israelis. American Jews must, however, recognize that statements critical of Israel or Israeli government policy are likely to be given disproportionate weight when uttered by Jews. They should speak, therefore, with prudent circumspection. In particular, they should give reasonable deference to positions taken by Israel through its regular democratic processes, especially on matters of security and defense.⁷

American Jews were to speak softly misgivings of the Israeli ethnic state, and to advocate for the State of Israel within their own country.

AMBIGUITY AND CLARITY

THE 1948 speech reflects the dual nature of AJC pre-statehood actions, a dual nature which may explain why there was little hope they could have successfully fought full manifestation of Jewish nationalism:

- in 1918, qualified endorsement of the British (Balfour) Declaration that intended to show a

⁷ "AJC on Israel-Diaspora Relations, A Policy Statement adopted by the Board of Governors, February 11, 1995," <http://www.ajc.org/site/apps/nl/newsletter2.asp?c=ijITI2PHKoG&b=839817>